

The Times Dispatch

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MONDAY, MARCH 2, 1914.

CAN THE ASSEMBLY SAVE ITSELF?

Twelve legislative days are left of the regular session of the General Assembly of 1914. Saturday night, when the constitutional session will have ended, and the members, unless they are willing to remain at work without pay, will have left the city.

For the month and a half that has elapsed since the session began, the members have practically nothing to show. They have passed the bill reducing the tax on money; they have voted for an enabling act—such as it is—and they have voted down the蒙古 bill. Beyond this, for good or for evil, the record is practically blank.

Here are the great issues which the Assembly was expected to determine, the issues upon which many members were instructed:

1. The reformation of our tax laws.
2. The amendment of the fee system.
3. The enactment of an honest primary law.
4. The preservation of our game and fish.

5. The redistricting of the Commonwealth.

6. The enabling act.

Other matters of lesser consequence, it was expected, would receive consideration; these stood out as the absolute essentials of the session. Members were hopeful that all might be settled; many were bold to predict an active, constructive session that would be memorable in the annals of the Commonwealth.

But where do we stand, with four-fifths of the session behind us? The enabling act, alone of all the real issues, has been placed upon the statute books.

The entire question of taxation has been postponed—so indefinitely and so uncertainly that the Assembly has not even agreed upon the personnel of the commission which is to consider it.

Of effective fee legislation there is little or no prospect. The West-Brewer bill, which was reported with ridiculous amendments, may receive approval, but in its present form is not worth the space it will occupy in the Acts of Assembly.

A primary law we may get, unless the Senate fritters away the rest of the session in such debate as consumed the sittings of Friday and Saturday.

The game bill may be passed, if the House can find time to discuss it in the brief intervals between the consideration of momentous bills to prohibit the sale of cider in one county, or to authorize the erection of a bridge in another.

Restricting is dead, absolutely dead. Besides all this, the House calendar, which merely lists the titles of pending bills, is a substantial pamphlet of sixty-two pages, while the calendar of the Senate occupies forty-seven. No bill that is seriously contested has had a chance of passage unless it is urged by a very strong element in the assembly.

The explanation of this deplorable situation can be made in a sentence: the will of the people has been defeated by talk, nothing more, nothing less. There have been many precious hours wasted in festivities, in receptions, to and speeches by celebrities. But these, in the aggregate, have not consumed a tithe of the time lost in the empty winding of verbal horns. Words, words, words—they have been spilt by countless millions, spilt until one walked through them and deep, spilt until veteran members have been driven to desperation and modest newcomers have lost their bearings.

It is too late to recommend any course that will enable the Assembly to regain all that it has lost, or even a considerable part of it. The fat is in the fire. But if the members will agree, in a spirit of broad patriotism, to leave local questions and to devote the remaining hours of the session to real work on serious questions, something may be saved from the wreck of verbiage. It may seem foolish to urge such a course when a majority of the members have small pet measures they wish approved; it may seem impossible to get action when a member pleads that the "honest bill on the calendar" is entitled to equal consideration with the most important. But in an Assembly where so many of the members are earnest, able and really anxious to meet the will of the people, cannot something be done?

Can the Assembly save itself from being remembered only for its amazing ability to do nothing?

The Progressives of Pennsylvania are picking candidates by the old back-room, secret conference of leaders method. It's time T. R. was coming home!

That public-opinion train of Mr. Bryan's has already run over the lobbyists in Washington.

Senator Penrose will soon be so busy looking after his political future in Pennsylvania that he will not have the time to spend in denouncing President Wilson's Mexican policy.

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WHY NOT A REAL JUG LAW?

Criticism of the pending jug law is some measure estopped by its patroon. If Senator Mapp, who introduced the bill, will state that he personally drew it, those who know him may be sure that, however they may distil the measure, it is drafted in honesty. Senator Mapp and Mr. Pennington, the patron in the House, are not men who will stoop to trickery or to deceit.

As introduced, the Mapp-Pennington bill does little to maintain the principle of local option beyond prescribing that the proclaimer of the blind tiger cannot receive more than a gallon of beer. In one case, it prohibits the shipment into dry territory of single packages containing more than that amount of whiskey, but it formally establishes the right of any man who wants less than a gallon of beer to get it, provided only that he will pay for it in advance and will sign a receipt.

This amendment has been discussed for two days, during which time there has been but one argument urged against it. The sole objection which any opponent of Senator Gravatt's plan has advanced—an objection advanced by every Senator who spoke against it—is that a primary is a party affair and that the regular election judges are bipartisan. Democrats do not want Republican judges officiating at their party primaries, and Republicans do not want Democratic judges officiating at Republican primaries, to the loss note in the cry raised against this report, however, backs confirming that both the opposing parties were signally defeated and driven back to the lines from which they started.

The answer comes clear and emphatic. A clean, square, honestly-conducted primary is essential, and if it must be purchased at the expense of partisan sentiment, the purchase price is exceedingly cheap. We cannot have a fair primary election where the judges, possessing enormous power to determine the result, are appointed through the influence of party committees. So appointed, they almost inevitably favor the candidates supported by those party committees. The provision that the regular election judges, instead of special hand-picked judges, shall officiate, insures the service of men who, appointed before the names of the candidates, have been made known, could not have been appointed to further the interests of any particular candidate or committee.

We are unwilling to allege that these friends of temperance stand back because they do not wish to accomplish their avowed object. We grant gladly what has sometimes been denied us—honesty of purpose in wishing actually to reduce the evils of strong drink. But conceding this, we can fancy but three reasons why an ironclad anti-jug law is not urged by those who have pushed the enabling act.

1. They are afraid such a bill will not pass.

2. They do not want any law passed which will strengthen the local option policy to the possible prejudice of future prohibition.

3. They are apprehensive lest a law forbidding the purchase of liquor will lessen the number of those who will vote for prohibition, while believing that they can still procure liquor by mail.

4. The redistricting of the Commonwealth.

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